

# GHANA 2022 INTERNATIONAL RELIGIOUS FREEDOM REPORT

## Executive Summary

The constitution prohibits religious discrimination, stipulates individuals are free to profess and practice their religion, and does not designate a state religion. Registration is required for religious groups to have legal status.

Religious groups and lawmakers reported that work had stalled on a proposed regulatory framework that would clarify individual religious rights and the responsibilities of publicly financed institutions, particularly in elementary and secondary schools. Protestant pastors representing mainline denominations said they recognized concerns regarding independent “self-styled” pastors accused of sexual misconduct, financial exploitation, and other abuses, but they opposed any legislation that would regulate religious practice. Construction on an interdenominational national Christian cathedral, projected to cost \$100 million, halted due to financial constraints after a scandal indicated public funds had been spent on the project without parliamentary approval. Government officials proposed spending 80 million cedis (\$8.2 million) in its annual budget proposal to continue construction, and opposition to the proposal intensified.

Muslim and Christian leaders continued to emphasize the importance of religious freedom and tolerance and reported communication and coordination among themselves on a wide array of matters. They also exchanged gifts and donations with other religious groups and publicized calls emphasizing tolerance and peace.

U.S. embassy representatives discussed with government officials the importance of mutual understanding, religious tolerance, and respect for all religious groups. Embassy officers discussed religious freedom and tolerance with religious leaders, including engagement with the National Peace Council and regional peace councils, whose governing councils included prominent religious leaders. In May, the Ambassador encouraged religious freedom and interfaith harmony in a social media post marking Eid al-Fitr. In July, the Ambassador made Eid al-Adha donations to the National Chief Imam. The Ambassador and other embassy officials routinely met with religious leaders, including from the charismatic Christian, mainline Protestant, and Catholic communities, as well as all major Muslim groups.

## **Section I. Religious Demography**

The U.S. government estimates the total population at 33.1 million (midyear 2022). According to the 2021 government census, approximately 71 percent of the population are Christian, 20 percent Muslim, 3 percent adhere to indigenous or animistic religious beliefs, and 6 percent belong to other religious groups or have no religious beliefs. Smaller religious groups include Baha'is, Buddhists, Jews, Hindus, and followers of Shintoism, Eckankar, and Rastafarianism.

According to the census data, Christian denominations include Pentecostals/Charismatics (44 percent of Christians), other Protestants (24 percent), Roman Catholics (14 percent), and others (18 percent). Protestant denominations include African Methodist Episcopal Zion, Anglican, Baptist, Evangelical Presbyterian, Lutheran, Methodist, Presbyterian, and Seventh-day Adventist. Other Christian denominations include African Faith Tabernacle Church, Church of Christ, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Church Universal and Triumphant, Jehovah's Witnesses, Kristo Asafo, Musama Disco Christo Church, Twelve Apostles Church, Mennonite, Eastern Orthodox, African independent churches, the Society of Friends, and numerous nondenominational Christian groups.

Muslim communities include Sunnis, Ahmadiyya, Shia, and Sufis (Tijaniyyah and Qadiriyya orders).

Many individuals who identify as Christian or Muslim also practice some aspects of indigenous beliefs. There are syncretic groups that combine elements of Christianity or Islam with traditional beliefs. Zetahil, a belief system unique to the country, combines elements of Christianity and Islam.

There is no significant link between ethnicity and religion, but geography is often associated with religious identity. Christians reside throughout the country; a majority of Muslims reside in the urban centers of Accra, Kumasi, and Sekondi-Takoradi and in the northern regions. Most followers of traditional religious beliefs reside in rural areas.

## **Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom**

## **Legal Framework**

The constitution prohibits religious discrimination and provides for individuals' freedom to profess and practice any religion.

Religious groups must register with the Office of the Registrar General in the Ministry of Justice to receive formal government recognition and status as a legal entity, but there is no penalty for not registering. The registration cost for religious groups is slightly lower than the fee for nongovernmental organizations. To register, groups must fill out a form and pay a fee of 270 cedis (\$28). Most indigenous religious groups do not register.

According to law, registered religious groups are exempt from paying taxes on nonprofit religious, charitable, and educational activities. Religious groups are required to pay taxes, on a pay-as-earned basis, on for-profit business activities, such as church-operated private schools and universities.

The Ministry of Education includes compulsory religious and moral education in the national public education curriculum. There is no provision to opt out of these courses, which incorporate perspectives from Christianity and Islam. There is also an Islamic education unit within the Ministry of Education responsible for coordinating all public education activities for Muslims. The ministry permits private religious schools, but these must follow the prescribed curriculum set by the ministry. International schools, including those that do not follow the government curriculum, are exempt from these requirements. Faith-based schools that accept funds from the government are obliged to comply with the directive that states students' religious practices must be respected. The High Court reaffirmed this principle in 2021 when it decided in favor of two Rastafarian students who sued the government when their school required them to cut their dreadlocks.

The country is a party to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.

## **Government Practices**

Debate stalled among religious groups and lawmakers concerning a proposed regulatory framework that would clarify individual religious rights and the

responsibilities of publicly financed institutions, particularly those regarding elementary and secondary education. The proposed framework had been under development since 2021, following reports of schools impinging on the religious rights of students, including the Wesley Girls' School barring Muslim students from fasting. The framework would explicitly codify the rights of students to engage in religious practice, delineating the responsibilities of the government, school administration, teachers, and students, but progress slowed after some Christian communities raised concerns regarding the government's role in regulating religious practice. Key stakeholders in the consultative effort included the Ministry of Education, Ghana Education Service, the Christian Council of Ghana, the Ghana Pentecostal and Charismatic Council, Muslim leaders, Office of the National Chief Imam, the Ghana Catholic Bishops' Conference, leaders of smaller faith communities, and traditional religious authorities. In August, in the context of the proposed regulatory framework, Catholic bishops stated that the government should appoint Catholics to head Catholic-owned schools whose teacher salaries are paid by the government. As of year's end, there had been no further movement on the proposed framework.

The issue of regulating "self-styled" pastors working outside of established ecumenical bodies continued to be debated between legislators and the Christian Council of Ghana, an umbrella group of mainly traditional Protestant denominations. The established religious bodies stated they recognized the concerns that the legislators expressed about the individuals – including allegations of sexual misconduct, false prophecies that cause fear and panic, and financial exploitation of church members – but opposed legislation that would regulate religious practice. The Ghana Charismatic Bishops' Conference, representing more than 4,000 charismatic churches, reiterated its opposition to any form of legislative or governmental framework.

Opposition to President Nana Akufo-Addo's proposal to build an interdenominational national Christian cathedral increased in June after news broke that the government had paid for parts of the project without seeking parliamentary approval. The President had previously stated that public funds would not be used for the project, saying only that the project would be constructed on state-owned lands. Construction on the cathedral halted in August due to funding constraints and public opposition. The board of directors for the project also stopped soliciting donations for the cathedral in August,

although the government's annual budget request included 80 million cedis (\$8.2 million) to continue construction. Critics continued to question whether the \$100-million cathedral complex should be a priority for a country with urgent development needs and argued that the project inappropriately linked the state with a particular faith.

In March, the government rescinded COVID-19 restrictions affecting public events. Religious leaders generally expressed appreciation that the government consulted with religious institutions on COVID-19 protection measures and welcomed the lifting of restrictions.

Government officials leading official events generally offered Christian and Islamic prayers and, occasionally, traditional invocations. President Akufo-Addo, a Christian, and Vice President Mahamudu Bawumia, a Muslim, continued to emphasize the importance of peaceful religious coexistence in public remarks. In his Eid al-Adha address, the President said, "I want to assure you of my continuing commitment to the well-being and progress of every Ghanaian, no matter their religious belief, ethnic identity, or political persuasion."

### **Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom**

There were continued Muslim-Christian and intra-Muslim tensions in the country, with the latter being found largely in northern areas. Researchers described the main cause of intra-Muslim tensions as doctrinal differences, with different groups interpreting the Quran and hadith (sayings or customs of Muhammad and his companions) differently. According to sources, chieftaincy, land tenure, and politics played important roles in exacerbating intra-Muslim tensions between the two major chieftaincies in the Dagbon region. They also noted that disputes between farmers and herders heightened tensions.

Muslim and Christian leaders continued informal dialogue between their respective governing bodies and the National Peace Council. Faith leaders said they regularly communicated among themselves on religious matters on ways to address issues of concern or sensitivity. Leaders regularly gave token gifts or donations to other religious groups' major projects and publicized informal courtesy calls emphasizing tolerance and peace.

## **Section IV. U.S. Government Policy and Engagement**

U.S. embassy representatives discussed with the Minister of Foreign Affairs and Regional Integration, officials from the Ministry of Education, and other government officials the importance of mutual understanding, religious tolerance, and respect for all religious groups. Discussions with regional ministers and other government officials emphasized the centrality of religious tolerance to peace and stability, particularly in the northern regions.

Embassy officials also met with a broad range of religious groups and civil society organizations, including Christian groups, such as the Christian Council and the Ghana Catholic Bishops' Conference, and prominent charismatic churches as well as Muslim civil society organizations, such as the Office of the National Chief Imam. They also engaged with the National Peace Council and regional peace councils, whose governing councils included prominent religious leaders. In addition, the Ambassador underscored in meetings with key religious groups, including the Office of the National Chief Imam and the Christian Council of Ghana, that the United States supports an individual's right to his or her faith, as well as the right of individuals not to practice any religion.

In April, the Ambassador encouraged religious freedom and interfaith harmony in a social media post marking Eid al-Fitr and presented customary gifts of food to the National Chief Imam. The embassy also commemorated Christian holidays through social media posts, including in local languages. Embassy officers discussed religious freedom and tolerance with religious leaders from various houses of worship and engaged them on the need to maintain broadmindedness. Embassy officials attended iftars and engaged Muslim organizations and educators on the need to advance religious freedom and prevent violent extremism related to religion. The Ambassador and other embassy officials also routinely met with Christian religious leaders, including from the charismatic Christian, mainline Protestant, and Catholic communities.

In July, the Ambassador visited the National Chief Imam to make an Eid al-Adha food donation. During their meeting, the Ambassador underscored the importance of avoiding religious extremism.

The embassy continued its support for the efforts of the West Africa Center for Counter Extremism, a regional organization that brings together traditional leaders, interfaith religious leaders, political party leaders, and local government authorities to emphasize messages of peace, tolerance, and nonviolence to vulnerable youth, organizing high-level roundtables with U.S. cabinet-level officials. During the year, the center organized community workshops and forums aimed at improving inter- and intrareligious (Muslim) relations in the Upper East, Upper West, and Northern Regions as well as capacity-building workshops in Accra that focused on preventing violent extremism related to religion and promoting leadership, security, stability, and good governance.